

Volunteers Descent on the Jungle with Axes in Hand and a Vision in Mind
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A new regional park is about to happen in Seattle.

It's not the Olmstead legacy of Jefferson Park, the wonders of Magnolia's Discovery, the Capitol Hill community of Volunteer.

Dr. Jose Rizal Park is about to become a gateway to Beacon Hill, the International District, downtown, and Seattle's waterfront.

To understand what these 8 acres on the tip of Beacon Hill will be is to know who Dr. Jose Rizal is.

The park was named for a man of medicine, of letters, of peace. If he had served our more media conscious age, Jose Rizal would be as familiar as Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Sun Yat Sen, or Mahatma Gandhi.

In the 19th Century, colonial Spain subjugated the Philippines to virtual slavery. A small middle class of native Filipinos arose, and though quality education was denied in their own land, opportunity existed abroad.

Jose Rizal received medical training in Spain, thriving with expatriate intellectuals. In novels and essays, he argued forcibly for freedom for the Philippines. In 1889, he wrote *Sobre la Nueva Ortografia de la Lengua Tagala*, at a time when works in Tagalog, the Filipino language, were banned. He believed his native tongue was the soul of his people.

Dr. Rizal maintained violent revolution would ultimately fail. For his courage, he was executed by a firing squad. He died in Bagumbayan, Manila, on December 30, 1896. After his execution, Filipinos called for a revolution against Spain. It would have succeeded save for an American fleet appearing in Manila Harbor in an action in the Spanish-American War. A new empire had arrived, to be cast off finally by Corazon Aquino.

To honor Filipinos contribution to Seattle, the city named this park in his memory. A bust of Dr. Rizal looks over the amphitheatre in the park, reminding us of the best we can be. That gaze has seen much change in our city's life: now another change is in sight.

The missing link of the Mountain to Sound Greenway Trail is about to be completed, construction beginning in 2006. The trail will sweep from 14th Avenue South, through the lower park, across and over the tangle of the I-5 and I-90 interchange, descend to Royal Brougham, to Puget Sound.

Many made this route possible.

In 1993, the Seattle Rotary Club, the Weyerhaeuser Company, and the Mountain to Sound Greenway Trust began a reforestation project--the cedars they planted are now firmly established.

In 1998, the Beacon Alliance of Neighbors formed, to address public safety for the community around the park and Northwest Beacon Hill.

In 2000, the Kingdome blew up. Thousands of people descended on the lower park to witness the event, establishing paths.

In 2001, Citizens for Off Leash Areas worked with neighbors to create a dog park for the broader community.

In 2002, the City of Seattle's Neighborhood Action Team engaged citizens and city, county, and state agencies to make the area safe, opening "The Jungle," Seattle's last forest, for conservation and the public, wresting it away from a violent heroin gang that abused homeless people and homeowners alike.

In 2005, the Beacon Alliance of Neighbors has sponsored \$165,000 in grants to open the forest to people, to preserve it for the 45 species of birds that roost in its trees and fly over it.

Last weekend, 50 volunteers from Americorps, Starbucks, Seattle University, and the community joined with Seattle Parks and Recreation crews to save trees from ivy, clean the eastern and southern slopes, and prepare the way for the park that will be.

In just a couple of years, thousands of commuters will bicycle daily to work from Seattle's South End and the Eastside through the park. Fans will bike to Mariners' games. Development spawned by light rail--like the Frye project planned just south of the International District--will make the park an urban forest destination.

Our neighborhood traditions will continue. People will gather to cheer as New Year's Eve and Fourth of July fireworks celebrate the sky. The coyotes and raccoons that live in the Jungle will prowl our nights, pad softly around our dreams.

On April 19, the Beacon Alliance of Neighbors will sponsor an open house on the future of Dr. Jose Rizal Park, the Jungle, and the Mountain to Sound Trail, at 7 PM, Quarters 1, at the corner of 14th Avenue South and South Judkins Street.

All are invited to attend in the spirit of Dr. Jose Rizal, and make this park a place to celebrate weddings, culture, friendship, or a moment beneath the maples moving in the breeze, a tribute to his living memory.